

Testimony of
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House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure -
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and
Emergency Management

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Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the important issue of preparing America to address the threat of terrorism within the context of the other risks we face as a nation.

Three perspectives inform my comments today. First I currently serve as the Assistant to Virginia Governor Mark Warner for Commonwealth Preparedness, a Cabinet level position responsible for ensuring the Commonwealth's readiness for emergencies and disasters of all kinds, including terrorism.

Secondly, I was privileged to serve as a member and Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction created by Congress in 1998 to assess our collective national ability to prepare for and respond to acts of terrorism. This past December we delivered our fifth and final annual report to Congress and the President.

Finally, I have been closely involved with local, state and federal prevention and response initiatives during the past 20 years – as a first responder, staff member and executive leader.

Since this nation experienced the tragic attacks on September 11, 2001, much progress has been made to enhance our individual local, state, federal, private sector and citizen

readiness as part of a larger national effort to prepare for emergencies and disasters of all kinds. This is important. It makes a difference in lives saved, property protected and negative economic consequences minimized.

But I would point out that our national effort did not begin on that sunny day in September 2001. The events of that day became a rallying point for a greater dedication of effort to build upon existing systems, processes and lessons of past tragedies. As a nation we have harnessed commitment of leaders in communities, state capitols, boardrooms, family rooms and America's capitol who have cast the smoking ruins of the Pentagon, World Trade Center and a rural field in Pennsylvania as a galvanizing factor to accomplish a safer and more secure America.

This past weekend a line of severe thunderstorms moved through Northern Virginia a little more than 40 miles to the South of this building. In the wake of the storms, trees were downed and power was cut to more than 50,000 Virginia citizens. The first responders along with other local and state officials who rapidly reacted to the multiple calls for assistance were less concerned about what caused the crisis – focusing on the need to assess the situation and to ensure the safety of their citizens.

This event clearly illustrates that Virginia and for that fact America are confronted with crisis' every day that threaten both the physical and economic well being of its citizens. Successfully responding to these types of crisis, just as occurred on September 11, 2001, depend on the synchronization of efforts by a multitude of organizations at all levels of government and in the private sector as well as by our citizens.

Let me be clear to the members today. This nation possesses a well documented and a well-understood strategic approach for synchronizing the efforts of government in responding to a crisis, irrespective of the hazard. We successfully utilized this strategic approach in dealing with every major emergency and disaster that has struck the United States in the past 20 years, including on September 11th.

Having said that, the events of that day underscored two important facts. First, all of the components of our national system need to better plan, train and exercise together, and required equipment must be obtained, according to pre-established and shared goals to address the plethora of issues associated with managing all aspects of an incident. This is not a new revelation. It existed prior to September 11th and was known and articulated by many of those who were on the front line of readiness. What changed on that day was the level of support among leaders to putting the resources into making this type of coordination possible and a priority.

Secondly, September 11th underscored that the readiness of our national system and each of its component disciplines and levels of governments required substantial investment to address the types of evolving risk and hazards potentially caused by a terrorist attack. With the exception of the first bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 and the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma there were few galvanizing incidents related to terrorism in this nation or elsewhere that produced the wholesale support for improved readiness. Investments targeted in the later half of the decade of the 1990's were for the most part focused on Weapons of Mass Destruction in the context of chemical, biological and radiological/nuclear weapons. While the use of planes as weapons resulted in mass destruction they did not fit the profile of what the federal guidance was suggesting that states and communities prepare to address. This is not a criticism. It is a simple recognition of where "policy" was at that point.

I believe that Virginia's experience and its success illustrates that an "all hazards approach" provides the type of tangible benefits needed to manage the full range of nations risks. When Governor Warner established the post of Assistant to the Governor for Commonwealth Preparedness in January 2002 he did so not knowing that America would create a Department of Homeland Security, he did not know that federal, state and local spending and policy would be dramatically altered and he did not know whether another attack was imminent. He did know, however, that Virginia needed to be as flexible as possible to manage our risk in terms of what we knew at that time and what we did not know in terms of the future.

Our job was not then and it is not now to create a parallel structure to manage the risk of terrorism. It is to work with and through other Cabinet officials, agency heads and a variety of other state staff along with our partners at the local and federal levels as well as in the private sector and with citizens to create an enterprise approach to preparedness. Our job, simply put, is synchronizing the efforts of people, money and policy to prepare for the full range of potential emergencies and disasters of all kinds, including terrorism. When Virginia's system can better manage a terrorist event it can better manage a natural disaster, naturally occurring disease outbreak or a major criminal event and vice-versa.

It is absolutely appropriate in the current time that we have a very deliberate focus on the risks caused by terrorism. The physical, economic and societal implications of the threat are enormous. But we must also balance the terrorist threat against the very real and all be it more likely scenario of a major natural or technological emergency or disaster occurring that while not intentional, inflicts a comparable level of destruction. In my humble opinion trying to closely compartmentalize the flow of federal funding, so that it does not encourage an all hazards approach, in favor of a single risk makes us potentially more and not less vulnerable. We need to manage America's risks in the same manner that corporations do. We must clearly understand the full range of risks we face and address them both individually and collectively to the level leaders feel is reasonable and appropriate given other legitimate competing priorities.

In Virginia we have spent much of our time during the past two and one half years focused on addressing the reality of terrorism – not to the exclusion of the other risks we face but in addition to. Last year when Hurricane Isabel left in her wake 33 deaths, more than 1.6 billion dollars of property damage and 1.8 million electric customers in the dark it was our approach to all hazards readiness that made the difference. Much of the more recent planning, equipment and training supported in part by homeland security funding provided the nexus for improved response and recovery to Isabel. Our lessons learned from Isabel will serve us well if the next crisis is Al Qada.

Also, when the National Capital Region was gripped by fear with the sniper attacks of 2002, many of the national strategies for enhanced coordination served as the basis for improved sharing of information among local and state law enforcement officials and communication with the public. These responses are just two examples of the major enhancements possible for America's readiness and it's because we have taken an enterprise approach to prevention, response and recovery – an all hazards approach.

Let me discuss the issue of funding. Additional federal resources coupled with adjustments in state and local funding focus because of the shift in priorities post 9-11 have been welcome. We are seeing measurable advances in the abilities of local, state and federal officials to prevent, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters of all kinds including terrorism. We must, however, resist the urge to measure our progress simply in terms of dollars spent.

In the aftermath of the September 11th and subsequent Anthrax attacks the first major area to see a dramatic increase in federal funding was bio-terrorism with more than 1.2 billion dollars of federal funding targeting and beginning to flow to communities and states by the spring of '02. Major increases of federal funding for so called "first responders" and related activities did not materialize until well into 2003. Virginia for instance received its initial notification of award for FY '03 State Homeland Security Grant Program Part I on March 7, 2003 and for Part II on May 14, 2003. We subsequently received approval of our proposed allocation approach on May 7, 2003 for the Part I monies and June 4, 2003, for the Part II monies.

That approval represents a first step in a federal funding process that has been appropriately encouraged by Congress and the Administration to ensure measurable advancement in capabilities. Missing in much of the rhetoric about the flow of funding is the absolute necessity for communities and states to weigh carefully how to best utilize funds to address the most pressing needs and the actual time needed for them to go through their process for procurement, delivery and utilization of resources acquired with

these federal dollars. The continuing goal must be to spend money wisely to apply resources effectively and not to simply spend dollars.

The movement of federal funding resources for “first responders” has been the source of much discussion during the past year. Secretary Ridge appropriately recognizes the complexity of the challenge and the need to get funding to communities and states and do so in a manner that will allow local and state officials to report back to Congress and the American people on the progress made. This past March he asked representatives of the key local and state stakeholder organizations to work together with the Department of Homeland Security to assess the funding situation – what is working and what is not – and to provide him recommendations that would help alleviate real and perceived concerns. Governor Warner is a member of the Task Force and I have been privileged to work closely with it on his behalf during the past 60 days.

I have found a genuine commitment among all local, state and federal participants to fairly and accurately judge the status of efforts. It would not be proper for me to pre-suppose their recommendations or what action Secretary Ridge might take. But I think it has been a profound learning experience for all of us. The one thing that was clear to me, however, is that there is a unanimous desire for success. I expect that the assessment of the Task Force can measurably assist with informing Congressional action for continued improvements in the funding process as well as identify best practices that can be used by others.

This Congress is currently considering legislation to adjust the manner by which federal funding is allocated and flows. Personally, I believe a risk based allocation system makes good practical sense in theory. I also believe that we are many years away from being able to implement such an approach. There is no systematic manner by which threats and risks are measured under a consistent national standard across communities, states, critical sectors and disciplines. In other words, no way to make apple to apple comparisons as the basis for allocations. Such an approach while laudable and

reasonable will require significant investment of time and effort – well worth it. It should be a goal for the future but we are simply not there yet.

I also believe that major adjustments to the current funding process could be counter-productive. As I said earlier there is a Task Force looking at the issue. Continuing and major changes to funding processes will cause an interruption in momentum. Local and state officials are just beginning to get their arms around the intricacies of the current funding processes. Where possible it appears that program adjustments are being made by the Department of Homeland Security to facilitate the flow of dollars.

Going back to an earlier comment, the major infusion of cash for the “first responder community” is just about one year old. In federal funding timelines that is infancy. While I am one who wants to quickly get money to where it will do the most good, I am also a realist. I have worked with federal grant programs for nearly 20 years and they never seem to be fast or flexible enough. But then again I am impatient and ultimately realize that there is a fine balance between speed and accountability. I must say that for the most part federal grant programs seek to achieve an equitable approach. My perception is that the funding processes are beginning to mature. I believe that we must balance our desire for instant success against the real need for a deliberate approach to provide sustainable and measurable investments that make America safer and more secure.

Today Virginia and this nation are much better prepared for emergencies and disasters of all kinds, including terrorism. Every day there are hundreds of thousands of men and women working hard to fight crime, address infectious disease outbreaks, fight fires and to keep our citizens safe and secure from the full range of other risks that we face. None of us knows what the next crisis will be. But we do know that there will be one. Irrespective of its cause our job is to make sure we can address the full range of prevention, response and recovery actions needed. An enterprise approach that provides for an all hazard capacity of readiness will give us the ability to deal with the next

surprise. Key to this readiness is moving from concept to completion and applying funding resources efficiently.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I will be happy to answer any questions.